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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I hope that everyone had a terrific long Memorial Day weekend! The weather was terrific, albeit a little warm for this time of the year. We had some guests over for a great barbecue. Too bad the pool wasn't ready for us all to enjoy; we could have used it! Hopefully we'll have it ready, or close to it, this weekend. We're still working on the leftover food and beer, so we're all set for awhile there!

With the short week, I haven't really considered a topic for this week's editorial. However, if you haven't tired of it yet, the Microsoft antitrust case appears to be winding down. Interesting case if you can figure it all out. I'm really curious as to what the final outcome will be; and how that outcome might impact the market. I don't really have a position on this case. I use PCs at work and at home, using Microsoft products among others. Some I like, and some I don't. I can see the points made by both sides in this case. My hunch is that Microsoft will have to make some concessions. I don't believe that Microsoft will be found guilty in the traditional sense of the word, but perhaps will be found liable on certain points. A partial victory for both sides seems to me to be the likely outcome. I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

On that note, I'll just add that we have an interesting issue for you this week. Even though the week was "shorter" we still have to manage to get an issue out on time! Enjoy!

Until next time...

AtarIRC V1.00 IRC Client Updated

From: Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

AtarIRC V1.00

The STiK IRC client AtarIRC by Lonny Pursell has been updated to v1.00. The main additions are: Improved DCC send (called fast DCC protocol, compatible with all other clients) for better transfer rates, an auto away timer which will mark you as away on the server if you leave your client idle too long (no keyboard input). Some bugs have been fixed as well.

http://www.bright.net/~atari/

[This news item courtesy of http://www.atari.org]
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Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

Atari to BMP Picture Converter

From: Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

Cyril Cogordan has released an "Atari to BMP" picture converter. This small application for PCs lets you convert most popular Atari 16-bit image files into BMP files.

It currently supports PI1, PI2, PI3, PC1, PC2, PC3, Neochrome (Low, Medium and High Res) and Spectrum 512 (SPU). Future versions will support more formats but send the author your support to make this happen.

You can get it from the official web site Epsilon (see link below) or download it from the Atari.Org FTP Server at ftp.atari.org in the /pub/toys folder. Filename: a2b_042a.zip - 18k ZIP file
http://epsilon.atari.org

[This news item courtesy of http://www.atari.org]
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Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

Aniplayer 2.06 Released

From: Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

Aniplayer 2.06 Released

Aniplayer, a media player, has been updated and again comes with a lot of new enhancements. There are now display and sound configuration boxes, a cool new 160*240 Falcon screenmode, better Milan Blaster support (CD frequency), Mpeg 2 bugfix and more. Aniplayer is shareware.

http://aniplay.atari.org

[This news item courtesy of http://www.atari.org]
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Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Remember last week when I sounded so happy that spring would be here for a while before summer slammed into us? Well, Mother Nature slipped me a ’mickey’ again. It’s been hot,

hazy, and humid for the majority of the past week... just the kind of thing that I had hoped to avoid until we got a little deeper into the summer.

But I guess that's not going to happen. Ah well, I guess I should be use to adversity by now. Heck, here I am, typing away on my Stacy... a 16 MHz (It's got an AdSpeed) 68000 computer with 4 meg of RAM, in the steamy heat, after a nasty day at work, wondering what I'm going to talk to you about this week. And the heck of it is that none of this is anything out of the ordinary. Truth be told, that's the way I like it. If I were to go around all day in some cushy job with nothing but air conditioning and tufted chairs, and came home to one of those wiz-bang PCs with all the latest bells and whistles that were all too willing to do just about everything for me, I'd soon become one of those drones in no time.

It's the fact that things AREN'T easy that makes us excel. There's a reason that successful offspring of successful parents are the exception rather than the rule. I could spout some of those truisms like "pressure makes diamonds", or "If you don't use it, you'll lose it", or the current favorite, "no pain, no gain", but the plain truth is that using a catch phrase to explain what makes us what we are... individuals, just grates on me. We've each got to choose which shortcuts to take as we travel along, and when we should take the longer, harder route. For me, it's always the travel that's interested me more than the final destination.

With that, let's take a stroll down the road and see what's happening on the UseNet...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

The author of my favorite MagiC oriented web page, Bengy Collins, asks:

"Would anyone like to take the initiative and setup an Atari ICQ database on the web, with user's ICQ #? (ie ICQ:38857203) <hi ron :-) > Since all atari's, even those w/o mintnet can use some version of ICQ, ... If not, I wouldn't mind doing it on MagiC Online, as I could easily use the new Atari.org Form mail."

Ronald Hall tells Bengy:

"Sounds like a pretty good idea to me! The easier it is for Atari users to stay in touch with each other, the better..."

Ronald Andersson, one of the brains behind the current version of STinG, takes a practical attitude to the question:

"Good idea I guess, as long as I don't have to do the work. <smile>"

Rob Mahlert tells bengy:

"Sounds like a good idea to me...

I would host it on Atari-users.Net. I'll have to take a look for a cgi script that could be made to do the work..."

Jo Even Skarstein posts:

"Some of you might remember that MagiC ate the boot-drive on my Falcon a couple of months ago. What happened was that MagiC wrote its boot-log all over the place, I found pieces of it in mint.cnf, some n.aes binaries, the gemsys-folder... Now, MagiC has never really worked on my Falcon so I just assumed that it was just another Falcon-problem. I deleted it from my Falcon, but kept it on my TT since I've never had any problems with it there.

But guess what happened on Tuesday? Right, suddenly I was unable to boot my TT because - you guessed it - MagiC's boot-log was all over the place. This time it had trashed the FAT as well, so I had to restore the entire partition.

Has anybody else experienced this? I was (didn't reinstall it) using 6.01, with NVDI 4.12 and HD-Driver 6.30, the Falcon was running NVDI 5.01 and HD-Driver 7.12 when it happened. MagiC has trashed partitions on my Falcon many times before, but it has never happened on my TT with previous versions."

David Leaver tells Jo Even:

"I've never had this misfortune, but about the first thing I did with Magic 6.01 was to disable the boot-log and opening screen. As I use both a boot selector and NVDI's device selector when booting to TOS, it's not a lot of help seeing what went on afterwards.

Without a boot-log, Magic 6.01, NVDI 5 and HD Driver 7.xx have behaved impeccably on my MSTe. On the TT with HD Driver > 7.00 I've had the problems with booting that I have been describing under another thread but the only problem with files that I have suffered during booting is the occasional disappearance of MAGX.INF."

Ronald Andersson adds:

"Aha, I was sure this must have happened to others beside myself, but this is the first time I see it confirmed. I haven't been reading this group very long, so I missed your earlier mention of it.

That [boot log all over the place] did not happen to me, but I suppose it is a matter of giving MagiCs boot logger more 'rope'... Sooner or later it may use it to hang the FAT.

My problems never got quite that serious, and were limited to a lot of trashed files, where after I figured out that the boot log was responsible and turned it off.

I suggest that you do install MagiC 6.01 again, but this time erase some lines in MAGX.INF before you try booting MagiC.

The lines to erase are all in the section headed by "[boot]". The line that must be erased starts with "log=".

Since the log will then be shown on screen, as for normal TOS, it is meaningless to keep the lines starting with "tiles=" and "image=". As for "cookies=" I prefer to handle such things with tried and true \AUTO\ utilities.

The net result of all this is that my "[boot]" section is empty, so the "[boot]" line is immediately followed by the "[vfat]" line. All my

MAGX.INF files have been fixed in this manner, and since I did that I have never suffered any of these problems again."

Jo Even tells Ronald:

"I have given it up on my Falcon, all versions I've tried has given me nothing but trouble. I'll probably reinstall it on my TT when I need it though."

Ronald tells Jo Even:

"I can understand your irritation, but if you have never tried MagiC 6 without that silly boot logger, then you simply haven't tried it for real. With that function disabled MagiC 6 is more stable than older versions."

> *Editor's Note: He's right folks. I've been using Magic 6.01 on my Stacy and TT, and without the bootlog option and a few other things that I considered of little use, it's a fast, slick, efficient OS.

James Smith asks about DVD drives:

"I was just checking the HD Driver page last night and spotted that versions after 7.1 now have support for DVD-RAM drives.

Does this mean I can now go to a local PC computer fair and pick one of these up dead cheap, plug it in, and play DVD movie disks?

Having seen the speeds that MPEG movies play on my 14 Mb Nemesised Falcon, (without sound) I find this hard to believe!

Not having actually examined one of these disks, what format are the movies in? What could be used to play them on our platform (if it is possible)? Here's hoping...."

Neil Roughley tells Jim:

"DVD-RAM is a different format than DVD-Video. DVD-RAM is essentially a high-capacity (2.6GB per side), re-writable CD, backwards-compatible for reading other CD formats."

The author of HD Driver, Dr. Uwe Seimet, tells Jim:

"No, it means that you can use DVD-RAM drives (with a capacity of 2 x 2.5 GByte per medium) like any other removable media drive. HDDRIVER is not a driver for DVD-ROM drives.

A DVD-ROM driver is required, similar to CD-ROM drives which require a CD-ROM driver. But an Atari is too slow for playing DVD movie disks anyway. And as far as I know the data on these disks are compressed and you have to pay a lot of money to get information about the compressing algorithm.

You can put any file system on a DVD-RAM drive, i. e. it must not be a CD-compatible filesystem like ISO9660. You can use a DVD-RAM drive just like any other removable media drive and put FAT filesystems on it."

Chris Wilkinson puts his own spin on the DVD question:

"True, the compression algorithm is not likely to be a commonly known

piece of information, but some DVD-ROM drives have a composite or a S-video plug on the back meaning that the video signal could be put to where it belongs...on a big-screen telly...computer monitors are too expensive and too small for that kind of application I believe.

Also the quality of playback I have observed on even P3 machines is dreadful, and quite frankly pales next to the quality from a dedicated DVD Video player."

Stephen Moss asks about video modes:

"This is probably a stupid question but does TOS 1.2 run in high res?. I thought that when I first got it I ran it in high res on a TV but I have tried it on both my Phillips CM8833 colour monitor in both colour and pseudo mono (green screen) modes and my current TV set (Hitachi) and on neither of these am I allowed to select the high res option."

Steve Stupple tells Stephen:

"Yes TOS 1.2 (or 1.02) will run in Hi-res, the problem you have sounds like you don’t have a Hi-res/mono monitor!

Using a colour one you can only access low and med resolutions. However using a program, such as Sebra and other mono emulators, will allow you to run most hi-res/mono programs although the picture quality is no where as good as the real thing."

Dennis Bishop posts:

"I have been using the FTP part of NEWSie to upload jpgs to my web space. When I first logon,get the DIR list and do an upload, this all goes just find, then after the file has been uploaded newsie displays the message ’sending request’ and sits there waiting for whatever until the coming of the next ice age. After 15 mins I hit reset to get out. and as I can’t use cab 2.7 because I get that Can’t Find RSC message, I can’t use it for FTPing."

Louis Holleman tells Dennis:

"same happens here, and also with aFTP. After the file’s been sent, it waits for the new dir to display and hangs forever. Simply quit, start again and do the next file. You’ll find the first file in the dir then too...

Just once (O-N-C-E) I had Newsie displaying the updated list a few secs after the transfer.

I always considered it an ISP problem (ftp-ing to my own pages), but perhaps we need a Windows-compatible ftp-program???"

Derryck Croker adds:

"I often find that I have to kick NEWSie’s ftp into life with a press of the [Esc] key here.

In any case you can’t use CAB to upload files, or did I read you wrong?

Re your rsc not found, check that you’ve got the right name for the rsc file which is CAB.RSC"

Dave Parsons asks for help with STinG:

"Tired of ASH's PPP-Iconnect, I have decided to try elsewhere in the world of inet connection software. After downloading sting, de-archiving it and placing what I found in the appropriate folders, every time I boot up, IT tells me it cannot find DEFAULT.CFG. Interestingly enough, neither can I. It doesn't seem to be found anywhere in the archive."

Matt Sheppard tells Dave:

"I had the same problem when I used STinG. The default.cfg should be located in the STinG directory on your ST. There should also be a .inf file (or .cgf perhaps) in the AUTO folder. Open up the file and make sure that the drive extension (A:, B:, etc) is correct."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Stay cool and always, always be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - JagFest '99 Update!
SongBird Announces New Releases!
"It's A Bug's Life"!
Dreamcast Prices to Drop!
And much more!

->From the Editor's Controller - Playin' it like it is!

I usually don't have a real lot to say about the gaming news because there's so much news out there that it's difficult to focus in on any one aspect. But, this week there are actually two interesting topics to mention. First, it appears that Sega just isn't having the predicted success for its Dreamcast console. In last week's issue we included a story regarding Sega's announcement to license some games to its competitors. This we week we learn that Sega is going to slash the price of the Dreamcast by about a third! That's a huge cut for a new machine. It appears that sales aren't what they expected, for whatever reason. It will be interesting to see where the major players are stacked up this fall, and into the holiday season.

The other bit of news that I don't often get a chance to discuss these days is pertaining to the Atari Jaguar. Yes, Atari is no longer. However, typical

of the Atari legacy, Atari developers and users just won't concede and roll over and die. With the recent Hasbro announcement to make the Jaguar an open platform, there's a renewed optimism for the Jaguar faithful. 4-Play's

BattleSphere is to be published. Carl Forhan's SongBird Productions has announced three titles that have recently been licensed, along with his own game, 'Protector'. Jaguar enthusiasts are eagerly waiting to see these games available. For our part at A-ONE, we're looking forward to being able to continue to bring you news of these pending games. We're also working towards obtaining copies of these games for review. We've waited a long time for an opportunity to review a new Jaguar game!

Our hope is that this good fortune for the Jaguar community continues after these initial releases. While it appears that the current developers will be footing the bill to publish their own games, perhaps these games will generate enough interest so that larger companies will have renewed interest. It's hard to tell as the Jaguar community has dwindled significantly the past few years. It may not be financially viable for developers to continue. Let's hope the interest continues!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sega Zaps One-Third Off Dreamcast Price

Sega Enterprises Ltd said on Tuesday it would slash the price of its Dreamcast video game machine by one-third in June in an effort to grab a larger share of the ultra-competitive domestic game market.

The Japanese game maker said it would reduce the price of its Internet-capable, 128-bit Dreamcast game console to 19,900 yen ($164) from 29,800 yen on June 24.

But the drastic price cut failed to impress investors amid growing concerns over the company's financial health and business prospects in the game machine market.

Shares in Sega ended Tuesday's Tokyo session at 1,910 yen, down 30 yen from its Monday close.

Nevertheless, Sega President Shoichiro Irimajiri told a news conference that the price cut will give the Dreamcast an important edge over its rivals, including a new powerful version of industry leader Sony Corp's PlayStation, which is scheduled to hit the market this Christmas.

He said the Dreamcast would enjoy a leading position in the market for some time as the price of the PlayStation II would take a while to come down to that level.

He also said Sega aims to sell two million units of the Dreamcast in 1999/2000, bringing cumulative sales to three million since its launch last November. Sega fell slightly short of its goal of selling one million units of the game before the end of March.

Sega said it would launch Dreamcast in the U.S. market in September at a price of $199. It will be launched in Europe also in September at a price of 199 pounds, Irimajiri said.

The race to produce the ultimate game player is heating up following Nintendo Co's recent move to join hands with Matsushita Electric Industrial to develop a next-generation machine to hit the global market by the end of 2000.

Analysts said at the time that it was hard to tell whether Sony or Nintendo would win the game battle, but agreed that there would be no quick change in Sega's position at the bottom.

Last week, Sega said it would stay in the red for a third straight year, hit by costly marketing fees for the planned overseas debut of the Dreamcast console.

Sega forecast a group net loss of 19.8 billion yen for the business year that started on April 1.

It suffered a steep group net loss of 42.88 billion yen the previous year from write-offs of loss-making overseas amusement facilities and inventories of the old Saturn game machine. ($1=121 yen)

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Comes to Dreamcast

Red Storm Entertainment Inc., today announced further expansion of the popular Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six franchise by signing a deal with Majesco Sales, Inc., who will develop and publish a version of the game for the Sega Dreamcast.

The game will be released simultaneously with the eagerly-anticipated system, making it one of the first titles for the new platform.

''We are pleased to announce that Majesco Sales, Inc. will be publishing Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six for the Dreamcast platform," said Morris Sutton, CEO of Majesco Sales. ''We are extremely excited to be introducing this dynamic game to the Dreamcast market and are pleased to be working closely with Red Storm Entertainment in the development."

The game, which is based on the story concept by popular writer Tom Clancy, centers around team Rainbow, an anti-terrorist task force operating under ultimate government secrecy. This multi-national team is called upon to rescue hostages, disarm bombs and gather intelligence to bring down the world's most deadly terrorists.

''Dreamcast is a fantastic format for Rainbow Six," says Dick Wnuk, Red Storm Entertainment Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing. ''We are looking forward to working with Majesco to broaden our fan base for the Rainbow Six franchise."

The scheduled launch date for Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six on Dreamcast will be September 9, 1999.

Bug's Will Rule When the Ultimate Animated Movie Adventure Comes To

The Nintendo 64 With the Release of Disney/Pixar’s ’A Bug’s Life’

Get a bugs eye view of the world when Activision, Inc., in collaboration with Disney Interactive, Inc., releases Walt Disney Pictures’ and Pixar Animation Studio’s blockbuster computer-generated animated film, ‘‘A Bug’s Life," on the Nintendo 64 game console the week of June 1, 1999. An action-packed, free roaming third-person, 3D adventure game, Disney/Pixar’s ‘‘A Bug’s Life" lets players run, fly and slide through an incredible interactive journey. The title will be available in more than 10,000 retail outlets throughout the United States and Canada and will carry a suggested retail price of $59.95.

In Disney/Pixar’s ‘‘A Bug’s Life" for the Nintendo 64, players take on the role of the film’s hero Flik, an inventive but occasionally over-enthusiastic ant, who enlists a group of flea circus bugs to help him in his quest to save his colony from the hands of the villainous Hopper and his legion of grasshoppers.

The game lets players journey through magical, fully-interactive 3D worlds that are brought to life through cinematic quality animations and ultra smooth game controls. Disney/Pixar’s ‘‘A Bug’s Life" challenges players to navigate through 15 dynamic levels and plush environments as they solve challenging puzzles in order to defeat an array of enemies -- from sneaky spiders to vicious wasps. During the course of their journey, players interact with a multitude of characters -- both good and evil -- from the feature animated film, including such favorites as Heimlich, Francis and Hopper. Many of the feature film’s original voice talent enhance the overall gaming experience.

Disney/Pixar’s ‘‘A Bugs Life" for the N64 features a unique, constantly evolving environment or ‘‘living world." Players are empowered by using seeds to grow plants, thus gaining access to useful power-ups, platforms and hidden areas within the lush world. Additionally, players can determine and control the difficulty of the game experience based on their individual pacing and actions.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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New Games Announcements/Back In Time

Posted by MPS (Mike Stulir)
(mstulirr.ne.mediaone.net) on May 31, 1999

Announcements! Announcements! Announcements! The new episode of Back In Time is all about major announcements.

This is the first episode to feature VIDEO. That’s right! Back In Time now has video.

As if that isn't enough, my guest is Carl Forhan of Songbird Productions. Everyone wants to know about the new games. Carl has MANY new product announcements for the Atari Lynx and Atari Jaguar. These announcements will blow your mind!!! Carl also talks about his experiences as a game developer.

I also take a few minutes to talk about my recent trip to New York City for the PGL Tournament.

Finally, I announce a future interview that I have lined up. This interview will be with the man that is the father of the massive video gaming industry that we have today. I don't want to give away too much, but his initials are "NB." Listen to the show for details.

JagFest Press Release [June 1]

Posted by Carl (Carl Forhan)
(socks1b.rochester.ibm.com) on June 01, 1999 at 11:08:02:

JAGFEST EVENT PULLING TOGETHER

June 1, 1999

For immediate release:

ROCHESTER, MN -- More and more, JagFest '99 is looking like the place to be for dedicated Atari gamers, particularly those located near the Midwestern location in Rochester, MN.

Carl Forhan of Songbird Productions, the host for this year's event, recently spoke about the vast array of support he has received for JagFest '99. "Atari fans and vendors alike are providing phenomenal levels of support for this year's JagFest," said Carl. "Fans will be bringing their equipment for display and entertainment. We're going to hold some tournaments, from the 2600 to the Jaguar, and have a number of prizes to give away including shrink-wrapped games, Jaguar lapel pins, controllers, and more. BattleSphere and Protector will be available for play. And you won't believe some of the rare and unreleased items lined up for the exhibit -- we'll have the Jaguar Voice Modem, a 7800 Klax prototype, Jaguar rotary controllers, and many more items."

Sponsors have likewise provided strong support. At press time, Carl Forhan has confirmed that Songbird Productions, Raven Video Games, and Zentanyx Multimedia will be present with a strong supply of merchandise for many platforms, especially Atari systems. Other sponsors have graciously donated Atari merchandise to be sold or awarded as prizes at JagFest '99.

"This is definitely going to be the biggest JagFest yet, and I'm confident that Atari fans will thoroughly enjoy JagFest '99.

Be sure to visit the JagFest '99 web site for the latest information:

http://jagfest.atari.org

To keep up to date with the latest news at Songbird Productions, be sure

to visit the company web site at http://songbird.atari.org, or send an email to songbird@atari.org.

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SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS ANNOUNCES UPCOMING ATARI RELEASES

June 1, 1999

For Immediate Release:

ROCHESTER, MN -- Songbird Productions is pleased to announce renewed support for Atari gaming consoles in the form of new releases for the Jaguar and Lynx.

Topping off the list is Ponx for the Atari Lynx. Ponx brings the ball-and-paddle classic that started it all to the Lynx. But this isn't your ordinary game. Ponx features a number of options, such as multiple balls, a Lynx controlled opponent with selectable AI, and more. Plus, in a throwback to classic handheld gaming, play against a friend on the same Lynx unit (no comlynx cable or second Ponx cartridge necessary!).

The target release date for Ponx is June 18, 1999, and the retail price is $39.95. If you are interested in ordering Ponx, please visit the Songbird Productions web page at http://songbird.atari.org. Dealer inquiries welcome.

Songbird Productions continues to make significant progress on Protector, a fast-paced 2D bi-directional shooter for the Jaguar. Anticipated release date is later in 1999.

In addition, Songbird Productions has licensed a number of unreleased games from former Jaguar developers. The games licensed are: Soccer Kid from Krisalis Software Ltd., Hyper Force from Visual Impact, and Skyhammer from Rebellion.

"Jaguar and Lynx fans have remained highly supportive of Atari game consoles," said Carl Forhan, owner of Songbird Productions. "I can't tell you how excited I am to have licensed these games from their respective companies and know that I will get them into gamers' hands in the coming months. This is a great opportunity for Songbird Productions to help sustain the Jaguar and Lynx into the next millennium."

At press time, no release dates had been set for any of the Jaguar products. All inquiries on these products should be directed to Songbird Productions only.

To keep up to date with the latest news at Songbird Productions, be sure to visit the company web site at http://songbird.atari.org, or send an email to songbird@atari.org.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Resumes Antitrust Attack On Microsoft

A government expert attacked Microsoft Corp.'s top economic witness Tuesday as muddled, ridiculous and credulous at the resumption of the software giant's antitrust trial.

Franklin Fisher of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology opened the government's rebuttal case, following a three-month recess, with an all-out attack on an MIT colleague who has testified for Microsoft in the trial.

Fisher also attacked a hallmark of the Microsoft defense -- that America Online's acquisition of Netscape Communications makes the trial irrelevant.

Fisher is the first of six rebuttal witnesses -- three for each side -- who will try to answer allegations made by the two dozen witnesses who have appeared so far in the trial, which began in October 1998.

Government lawyer David Boies and Fisher attacked the testimony of Microsoft's chief economic witness, Richard Schmalensee, dean of the Sloan School of Management at MIT and a former student of Fisher's. Schmalensee will get his chance to reply later.

Boies displayed a transcript from Schmalensee's testimony in January, when he testified that Microsoft recorded its billions of dollars in sales for its flagship Windows product without benefit of computers.

''Mr. Boies, they record operating system sales by hand on sheets of paper," Schmalensee had said of Microsoft.

Asked for a comment, Fisher sorrowfully dismissed his former student's remarks: ''I think professor Schmalensee, with his usual good nature, was rather credulous."

Boies asked Fisher if Schmalensee mistakenly included too many software companies among Microsoft's competitors. Boies noted that Schmalensee had testified: ''The question of whether Microsoft has monopoly power over the operating system is not relevant to the theory of anti-competitive conduct advanced by Professor Fisher...."

Shot back Fisher: ''It's ridiculous to assume that is not relevant. The case is about Microsoft's action to protect its monopoly."

Fisher said that Schmalensee's view, which is that Microsoft competes in a broad market for microcomputer software, ''leads to a lack of ... systematic thinking and some muddled results."

''This question is about the personal computer operating system. The question of the microcomputer software industry is not relevant," Fisher said.

Much of the case has centered on Microsoft’s alleged unfair competition against Netscape Communications’ Web browser. Microsoft said that when AOL purchased Netscape the entire government case became irrelevant, because now AOL/Netscape would compete against Microsoft.

But once again, Fisher said the Microsoft argument was too broad.

‘‘Is there any effect on Microsoft’s PC operating system monopoly?" because of the AOL-Netscape merger, asked Boies.

‘‘No, there isn’t," replied Fisher.

Fisher also rejected another claim of broad competition, disagreeing with Schmalensee’s view that Microsoft faces competition from new hand-held personal devices.

To support his view, Fisher cited a magazine article by Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates.

Fisher said he did not believe that the PC faced a threat from other devices. ‘‘According to a recent Newsweek article, neither does Mr. Gates," Fisher said.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates wrote recently in Newsweek that he expected PCs to thrive and said he was betting the future of his company on it.

The government and 19 states accuse Microsoft of using its dominance of the personal computer operating system to gain market share in other sectors, such as ‘‘browser" software used to surf the Internet’s World Wide Web. Microsoft denies that it has engaged in unfair anti-competitive behavior.

Witness: Merger Won’t Hurt Microsoft

Seeking to soothe a judge’s concerns about implications of the $10 billion merger of two of Microsoft’s biggest rivals, a government witness said Tuesday the deal is too little, too late to pose a credible threat to the software giant.

The testimony of Franklin Fisher, an economist, clearly was aimed at easing misgivings that U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson had expressed earlier in the Microsoft trial, when he said America Online’s purchase of Netscape Communications Corp. ‘‘might be a very significant change in the playing field."

Final testimony in the trial began Tuesday, with the government using Fisher as a lens to focus the judge’s attention on the Microsoft Corp.’s alleged aggression toward rivals and away from the impact on the AOL-Netscape alliance.

America Online Inc. currently distributes a version of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser to its more than 17 million subscribers and is contractually obligated to continue until January 2001.

But Fisher said that even if AOL were to distribute Netscape’s software, which he described as ‘‘very, very unlikely," the move would be insufficient to revive Netscape as a threat to the dominance of Microsoft’s

Windows.

‘‘I think it’s too late, and I think Microsoft thinks it’s too late," Fisher said. ‘‘It’s enough for Microsoft to obtain a high share of the browser business, and that they’ve done."

Fisher testified earlier Tuesday that Microsoft’s business decisions - such as spending millions to create its Internet Explorer software, then giving it away - were illogical unless its intent was to protect its lucrative Windows monopoly.

Government lawyers contend Microsoft feared that Netscape’s browser threatened to evolve into a system that could displace its flagship Windows software by running a new generation of computer programs using the Internet.

Microsoft argues that it bundled its Internet Explorer software free into newer versions of Windows because it offered consumers technical benefits, such as the ability to ‘‘browse" a computer’s storage devices the same way that people browse for information on the Web.

‘‘They spent hundreds of millions on development of a product, and they gave it away," Fisher said. ‘‘Microsoft documents do not say, ‘We’re doing this to make a lot of money.’ ... These are practices that make no economic sense on their own."

Microsoft ‘‘can’t possibly lead to the recoupment of the money that was spent on the development of Internet Explorer," Fisher said.

Fisher, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also derided earlier testimony by Richard Schmalensee, the dean of MIT’s Sloan School of Management.

Schmalensee, appearing as a Microsoft witness, argued forcefully earlier in the trial that Microsoft isn’t a monopolist and doesn’t behave as one. Schmalensee will take the stand again later this month as one of the final witnesses.

Fisher said Schmalensee’s focus on the entire software industry, rather than on the narrow slice that sells computer operating systems, presents ‘‘a whole series of problems" and ‘‘muddled results."

But Fisher did offer that exactly how to define the specific market where Microsoft wields its influence is ‘‘not a question with a very definitive answer."

‘‘It’s possible to disagree what the market is," Fisher said.

He also mildly criticized Schmalensee’s previous testimony that Microsoft’s accounting records were kept ‘‘by hand on sheets of paper." Fisher wouldn’t comment on the claim except to say that Schmalensee, ‘‘with his usual good nature, was rather credulous."

Much of Tuesday’s testimony centered on Fisher’s economic analysis of Microsoft’s business, which even Fisher conceded grew dry in parts. He prefaced one answer by warning, ‘‘I’m not sure this is going to be the most exciting part of this day."

‘‘You could always tell me it’s a meaningless nuance," joked Justice Department lawyer David Boies.

But even as Fisher greeted Boies from the witness stand to open his testimony, Fisher clearly anticipated the aggressive questioning he faces from Microsoft lawyers later this week.

‘‘Mr. Boies, it’s nice to be here, so far," Fisher said.

Microsoft Lawyer Attacks View Of Key Witness

A Microsoft Corp. lawyer Wednesday attacked the testimony of the government’s chief economic witness in the company’s landmark antitrust trial, and also appeared to question the credibility of a public statement by Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates.

Microsoft lawyer Michael Lacovara closely questioned the testimony of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Franklin Fisher, who argued for the government that Microsoft wields monopoly power with its Windows operating system for personal computers.

Much of the case brought by the Justice Department and 19 states has focused on Microsoft’s alleged misuse of that monopoly to compete against Netscape Communications in the market for Web browsers to peruse the Internet.

Microsoft argues the landscape has changed now that America Online Inc. has acquired Netscape. Lacovara offered documents and asked questions in an attempt to show that the deal has made the government’s case irrelevant.

At one point, Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson told Lacovara he had offered enough documents and that he should move on. At another point, Lacovara elicited what seemed to be a concession from Fisher about potential threats faced by Microsoft from a broad market that extends well beyond the operating system.

‘‘Microsoft unquestionably cares about anything that would reduce the demand for the PC operating system," Fisher said. Lacovara presented several exhibits to show that Microsoft faces competition from a host of new portable information devices in the next few years, such as 3Com Corp.’s Palm Pilot hand-held computer, and from the potential transformation of the Sony Playstation’s powerful chip into a serious computer.

Fisher has testified that Microsoft is not really in competition against those devices, but instead is part of a narrow market for personal computer operating systems.

When Lacovara pressed him, Fisher said -- as he did one day earlier -- that his views were embraced in a Newsweek perspective article written by Gates himself.

In the piece, Gates wrote that ‘‘predicting the imminent demise of the personal computer has become an annual ritual." Gates noted that ‘‘well over 100 million PCs will be sold this year. That means the world now buys almost as many PCs as color TVs."

‘‘The PC’s growing popularity isn’t surprising," wrote Gates, who ended the piece: ‘‘I’m betting Microsoft’s future on it."

Fisher said such views backed up his testimony that competition from other devices was not relevant to the personal computer operating system market.

Then Lacovara asked: ‘‘Isn’t that exactly what you’d expect Mr. Gates to say publicly, given the nature of Microsoft’s business?"

The Sullivan & Cromwell lawyer continued by asking if what Gates said was ‘‘consistent with what the vast majority of the Microsoft internal documents say. Do you know if what Mr. Gates is saying publicly is consistent with what people in the industry are saying?"

Fisher replied: ‘‘What Mr. Gates said publicly is not consistent with the vast majority of the Microsoft documents."

Later, government lawyer David Boies told reporters that "Microsoft’s lawyers are now having to disavow not only what the testimony of the industry experts has been, not only what the uniform testimony of the witnesses have been, not only what their internal documents say, but even the contemporaneous statements of their chairman."

Earlier, Boies asked Fisher about a newspaper advertisement signed by 240 economists by the Independent Institute, an organization that Boies said later gets some of its funding from Microsoft.

The ad, which ran on a full-page in the New York Times Wednesday, attacked ‘‘antitrust protectionism" and said that current antitrust actions by the government have been sought by rival firms.

Fisher said antitrust actions are for the benefit of competition, which ultimately benefits consumers.

‘‘Competition always ends up being good for consumers," he said.

Witness For U.S. Concedes Point To Microsoft

The government’s lead economic witness in its antitrust trial against Microsoft Corp. said Thursday that another witness exaggerated a central point in the government’s case.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Franklin Fisher conceded under cross-examination by a Microsoft lawyer that Microsoft rival Netscape Communications had greater market penetration than claimed earlier by a Netscape executive.

James Barksdale, then the chief executive officer of Netscape, said in testimony last Oct. 27 that Microsoft had choked off wide distribution of Netscape’s browser by bundling its own Internet Explorer with Windows 95 and Windows 98, the operating systems used to run most personal computers.

‘‘The reason people get their product today is because it comes with the computer from the store," Barksdale charged from the witness stand. ‘‘Or the reason they get it today is because it’s given to them or presented to them by their Internet Service Provider. That’s over half the distribution channel for this industry and we’re basically out of that."

Microsoft lawyer Michael Lacovara confronted Fisher with figures prepared

as part of the discussions preceding the purchase of Netscape by online provider America Online in November.

‘‘Is that consistent with what Netscape told AOL three weeks later?" Lacovara asked Fisher, citing figures that 22 percent of computer makers shipped Netscape Navigator and 24 percent of the top 20 Internet Service Providers offered Netscape.

‘‘If they’re at 22 percent and 24 percent, I think this (Barksdale’s testimony) is an exaggeration," Fisher conceded.

A central government allegation is that Microsoft abused its monopoly power by foreclosing competition with Netscape Communications in a bitter battle for control of the market for Web browsers, the software used to surf the Internet.

The Justice Department and 19 states allege that Microsoft exercises monopoly power in the market for personal computer operating systems.

Microsoft Case Winds Toward an End

As the government’s antitrust case against Microsoft Corp. winds toward an end in federal court, it seems at times that company chairman Bill Gates and his own lawyers are reading from different scripts.

This week, for at least the second time during the high-stakes trial, comments by Gates have undercut his lawyers’ arguments. In the latest instance, as Microsoft argued in court that it faces rigorous competition from new technology devices, Gates wrote in Newsweek that personal computers - which depend almost exclusively on his company’s Windows operating system - will remain the industry standard.

Microsoft’s mixed message - telling the judge one thing but saying something else outside the courtroom - was immediately noted by the government’s lead lawyer and a witness this week, as the trial resumed after a three-month recess.

The government lawyer, David Boies, referred to ‘‘a cleavage of what the lawyers want to argue in court and what the company says."

In court Wednesday, Microsoft lawyer Michael Lacovara tried to minimize the significance of the billionaire chairman’s apparently contradicting his legal team’s arguments.

‘‘Isn’t this exactly what you’d expect Mr. Gates to say, given his company’s business?" he asked.

The argument that Microsoft faces stiff competition from a new generation of technology devices is intended to persuade the judge that the high-tech industry is sufficiently robust despite complaints about Microsoft’s alleged aggression toward software rivals.

But in his Newsweek article, Gates wrote that personal computers would work ‘‘in tandem with other cool devices" rather than be replaced by them.

‘‘Given my job, it’s hardly surprising that I’d say this," Gates wrote, without mentioning his company’s legal problems. ‘‘But I’m betting

Microsoft’s future on it."

In seven paragraphs, Gates - famous for his business acumen and his vast fortune - managed to give the government another club to use against Microsoft in the courtroom. Microsoft even included a prominent link to the article on its corporate Web site.

Microsoft indicated it will argue today that it faces threats from other upstart rivals, such as the niche Linux operating system software rapidly gaining popularity but still significantly behind Windows.

But, again, the company’s lawyers will wrestle with comments Gates made outside the courtroom. He told a technology conference in April that Linux’s impact ‘‘will be fairly limited."

The government’s witness this week in the new phase of the trial, economist Franklin Fisher, maintains that Microsoft’s influence is not threatened by any new devices or emerging technologies, such as Internet TV, powerful game consoles or handheld appliances.

‘‘I don’t believe that’s likely to happen, and according to a recent Newsweek article, neither does Bill Gates," Fisher told the judge earlier this week.

It was at least the second time that comments from Microsoft’s top executive outside the courtroom stood in sharp contrast to the company’s position inside the courtroom.

Earlier in the trial, economist Richard Schmalensee explained to Boies under oath why he couldn’t provide precise figures about Microsoft’s profits, saying the company’s decidedly low-tech accounting techniques ‘‘do not always rise to the level of sophistication one might expect."

When Boies pressed him, Schmalensee added: ‘‘They record operating system sales by hand on sheets of paper."

Weeks later, Gates described in his newly published book how Microsoft tracks sales figures digitally by product and country, to determine exactly how sales compare with budget.

‘‘When figures are in electronic form, ... workers can study them, annotate them, look at them in any amount of detail," Gates wrote in ‘‘Business at the Speed of Thought."

Outside the courtroom, Boies said he never believed Schmalensee’s explanation about paper ledgers at Microsoft.

‘‘I believe Gates," Boies said. ‘‘This time."

Microsoft Antitrust Trial Opens In Connecticut

A small Connecticut software firm told a federal jury Thursday that it was a victim of what it called Microsoft Corp.’s master plan to crush competition and illegally extend its monopoly in computer operating systems.

Microsoft called the charge ridiculous.

‘‘When an elephant asks a mouse to dance, it’s the mouse that is in danger, not the elephant," Patrick Lynch, a lawyer for Bristol Technology Inc., told the 10-member jury on the opening day of a closely watched antitrust trial.

The trial, held in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport, Conn., is expected to conclude by late July, and may be the first of several legal actions against the Redmond, Wash.-based software titan to receive a verdict.

The suit by Bristol, a 70-employee company with $8 million in revenues, alleges that the $14.5 billion Microsoft has stifled competition by controlling access to its Windows NT source code -- a charge that Microsoft hotly disputes.

The Danbury, Conn.-based Bristol claims that Microsoft cynically manipulated its so-called WISE (Windows Interface Source Environment) program to gain a foothold in the market for heavy-duty corporate computers and then prevent developers from writing software for the competing Unix operating system.

Bristol makes a product called Wind/U, which acts as a bridge between developers writing software for computers based both on Microsoft’s Windows operating system and on Unix.

Bristol’s original, three-year agreement to license source code from Microsoft under the latter’s WISE program expired in 1997.

‘‘Microsoft’s reason for establishing WISE, and its reason for hobbling WISE, was to destroy competition for its monopoly," Lynch told jurors.

But Microsoft shot back that that charge was ridiculous.

‘‘You will hear from Bill Gates, Microsoft’s chairman, saying that he was always in favor of continuing the WISE program, and that Microsoft therefore tried to negotiate new contracts with Bristol and Mainsoft," David Tulchin, a lawyer for Microsoft, told the court.

Videotaped testimony by Gates, recorded on March 17, is expected to be played in court Friday or Monday, lawyers said.

Microsoft claims that Bristol is simply using the courts in a selfish attempt to obtain more favorable source-code licensing terms than that of its Sunnyvale, Calif.-based competitor, Mainsoft.

‘‘Evidence will show that Bristol, instead of taking a new contract that was available to them, chose litigation instead of negotiation," Tulchin said.

‘‘The main question the jury is being asked to decide is, does Bristol have the right to insist on the terms of a license from us, even though they were offered a license on terms their competitor took and is doing very well with?" Steve Aeschbacher, a senior corporate lawyer for Microsoft, told Reuters in an interview last Friday.

Tulchin said Bristol is still welcome to accept the new licensing arrangement that it originally rejected.

Bristol President and Chairman Keith Blackwell told reporters during a break that the case boils down to one question: ‘‘Are there any limits in

how Microsoft can use its monopoly position to stymie competition in these (technical workstation and departmental server) markets?"

Blackwell said Bristol became a victim of Microsoft's alleged strategy of using its cross-platform WISE program as a "Trojan horse" to invade new markets and then eventually kill off non-Windows applications and systems.

''I think they knew when they started the WISE program that they would eventually use it as a weapon against Unix," Blackwell said.

The Connecticut trial started two days after Microsoft's federal antitrust trial in Washington, D.C., resumed following a three-month break.

Microsoft To Drop Wholesalers

Microsoft Corp. plans to phase out its use of wholesale distributors for most products in its new home and retail division that includes computer games, the popular Encarta encyclopedia and the Works productivity suite, a Microsoft official told Reuters.

Robert Bach, head of the software giant's new division which has sales of about $1.2 billion, said the wholesale distribution model was failing for consumer-oriented titles like Encarta and top-selling games like Age of Empires.

''From a retail perspective, we were one of the few consumer software companies that went through distribution," Bach said in an interview. ''It's an execution driven business and doing that through a distributor was just hard."

Microsoft's decision to deal directly with its largest retail store chains for home and retail division products will have no effect on the Redmond, Wash. firm's continued much larger sales of its Windows operating systems and Office software suite to wholesale distributors, Bach said.

Under the old system, Microsoft sold its products to number 1 wholesaler Ingram Micro Inc., along with Tech Data Corp. and Merisel Inc., who in turn negotiated deals with retail store chains that sold the products to consumers.

Under the new plan, to be phased in over the next 12 months, Microsoft will negotiate and sell directly to its 12 largest retail store chains accounting for 85 percent of home and retail division sales, Bach said.

Bach said products in his division are sold mostly around Christmas and have rapid price and feature evolution cycles, complicating wholesale distribution.

''We're going to take our top 12 accounts direct so we will be negotiating and selling with our top 12 retailers -- about 85 percent of our business -- over the next 12 months," Bach said. ''Retailers have asking for that from us for two or three years."

The wholesalers are cut out, although Ingram Micro will perform some services as a Microsoft ''outsourcer" like warehousing and shipping software products.

A spokeswoman for Ingram Micro said the company generally does not comment on such issues but added that the company was pleased to be selected as Microsoft’s outsourcer.

Tech Data declined to comment.

Merisel officials could not be reached immediately.

Ingram Micro stock opened on the New York Stock Exchange Friday at $29.125, unchanged. On the Nasdaq, Merisel opened at $2.9375, up $0.1875, and Tech Data opened at $37.125, down $0.125.

Police Get Personal in Online Crime

Go for a walk, drive a car or dance in the moonlight and chances are, no one notices. Journey on the Internet and a trail is left.

And police are hot on that trail in a growing number of criminal investigations.

Armed with search warrants, police are looking into the online activities of suspects, and sometimes victims, by seizing evidence from Internet service providers and finding material that people online never dreamed would end up in the hands of the law.

Private e-mail between lovers. The threatening missives of haters. The true identities of people hiding behind screen names in a medium they thought was the essence of secrecy.

‘‘Ultimately, if you break the law, it can be traced," said investigator Ron Horack of the Loudoun County, Va., sheriff’s department. Horack helps police around the country apply for search warrants to get material from the county-based America Online, the world’s largest Internet service provider with 18 million customers.

‘‘I know who you are and where you live," an anonymous hatemonger e-mailed a 12-year-old girl in Lancaster, Pa. By peeking into the accounts of Internet providers, police can often say the same thing: They know who the threatening people are and where they live.

This week federal authorities said they had charged a northern Virginia pediatrician with possessing child pornography after investigating his AOL account and finding at least 22 explicit images sent to him via e-mail over the course of nearly six months. They said they then found more child pornography on his computer. The doctor could not immediately be reached for comment.

With a warrant, law enforcement authorities can look at the electronic mail and other online communications of people suspected of a range of serious crimes, getting information not just from a home computer but often the company that provides the Internet, e-mail or chat service.

They can do the same with victims, in the process seeing mail from people who corresponded with them but had nothing to do with a crime. Everything from humdrum to-do lists to love letters from illicit digital dalliances becomes potential evidence, and eventually a matter of public record.

‘‘It is a growing risk to privacy," said Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, who says police should stick to traditional methods such as stings, informants and forensic evidence, which don’t invade people’s communications.

Said Horack: ‘‘If they’re going to use the Internet for their crime, we’re going to use the Internet to catch them."

Authorities turned to AOL to see some of the online activities of the two high school students who killed 13 other people and themselves in Littleton, Colo., last month. They’ve used it to try to track down some of the copycat threats that have closed many schools since.

They took the same route, thus far with inconclusive results, after a woman in Pennsylvania was told in a chat room, ‘‘I guarantee you I will hurt you if you don’t listen to me," and when a man in New York was charged with attempted murder of his wife, who, police say, was having a passionate online encounter her husband happened to see.

‘‘AOL is extremely law-enforcement friendly," Horack said. ‘‘They don’t hold anything back."

America Online tells its nearly 18 million customers it won’t read or disclose private communication or personal identifying information except under a ‘‘valid legal process."

Other major Internet service providers, or ISPs, as well as separate online e-mail services and Internet hubs like Hotmail and Yahoo, say much the same, although the disclaimers may be hard to find in screens of small print.

‘‘We have a long-standing policy of cooperation with law enforcement," said AOL spokesman Rich D’Amato.

Communications such as e-mail are disclosed only in criminal investigations and with a warrant, he says. In response to orders in civil cases, AOL may give out information allowing someone’s real name to be matched to a screen name.

So if a spouse is found to be having an online affair with someone known only as Heart4U, the identity of that cyberlover might eventually be uncovered in a divorce proceeding.

Raytheon Inc. obtained subpoenas to identify 21 people, most of them employees, said to have been spreading corporate secrets and gripes in an anonymous online chat room.

It then dropped a lawsuit it had brought against the 21, each identified as ‘‘John Doe," indicating to privacy experts that the company had gone to court in the first place only to learn the identities of the chatters. Four employees quit; others entered corporate ‘‘counseling."

Privacy advocates worry that authorities could go on increasingly invasive fishing expeditions.

‘‘There are simply many more events that are recorded (online) that would not be recorded in the physical world," said Rotenberg. ‘‘I think it is going to become an enormous problem as people become more and more dependent on ISPs."

Meanwhile, tools continue to be developed to protect anonymity - a site called anonymizer.com, for one, will relay e-mail, stripping out the sender’s identifying information.

So far, at least, few warrants going to AOL look like goose chases, an impression formed after a review of the more than 100 that have been filed in Leesburg this year.

Most involve alleged pedophiles, stalkers and harassers who have used the Internet to find prey and left evidence of their intentions with victims or undercover police.

Horack prepares warrant applications for police from other parts of the country, some so new to digital detective work they need their children’s help to get online. Once they are approved by a magistrate, he takes them to AOL and retrieves the information. It’s almost a full-time job, offered by the sheriff because the company gives such a big boost to the county.

The warrants are especially effective against child pornographers, Horack says. ‘‘Pedophiles are pack rats. They don’t throw away anything." Even when they do delete material from their computer, it might be found at the service provider.

In the case of the 12-year-old Pennsylvania girl, nothing turned up in the AOL search. Most of the time, something does.

For example, police in Hendersonville, Tenn., turned to AOL to see the Internet activity of Dennis Wayne Cope, 47, shot and found dead in a crawl space of his home in February.

In an affidavit seeking access to Cope’s e-mail, ‘‘buddy list content" and other online activities, police said he had been corresponding online with the estranged wife of suspect Robert Lee Pattee. They also say Pattee’s hand print was found at the scene.

Pattee has been charged with first-degree murder.

Users Irate As 2nd Line Slows Modems

Some people who buy a second phone line for their computers are getting a nasty surprise.

High-speed modems, those things that connect the computer to the Internet over the phone lines, sometimes slow their data processing speeds dramatically. U S West blames aging copper phone lines.

However, some Internet providers believe the company is using the problem to push its own Internet service.

The Baby Bell acknowledges that certain equipment it uses can slow modems. But U S West denies it is taking advantage of the situation to boost its own business.

The Attorney General’s Office has received complaints about the slowdowns from angry Web surfers, but wouldn’t directly confirm if an investigation is under way. Assistant Attorney General Karen Fisher said, ‘‘We have a policy of not talking about current and ongoing investigations."

The slowdown is caused when the company installs equipment called ‘‘pair gain" or ‘‘multiplexers" to increase the capacity of existing lines, said Peggy Moore, U S West regulatory manager.

While that doesn’t affect voice transmission, it can slow data transfer significantly, she said.

Hank LeMieux, president of the New Mexico Internet Professionals Association, thinks the company will be more likely to provide a dedicated phone line rather than a multiplexer to someone who orders U S West’s Internet package.

A few Internet providers, he said, have complained that the company will remove a multiplexer from the line of someone who switches to the U S West Internet provider from another service.

Marianne Granoff, an Internet consultant, said she turned over to the Public Regulation Commission, which oversees telecommunications businesses, a handful of e-mail messages from users who complained that the company suggested they switch to U S West’s Web product when they called about slow modem speeds.

Moore says the company doesn’t give preferential treatment for signing onto the company’s Internet offering.

Multiplexer equipment, she said, is installed wherever there are too few existing copper lines to handle demand regardless of whether the customer relies on U S West for Web access.

That’s true, but it highlights the company’s failure to upgrade its system, said Chuck Noble, PRC legal division director.

Sony Robot Dog Sells Out On Internet In 20 Minutes

Sony Corp said its robotic dog sold out in Japan 20 minutes after going on sale exclusively over the Internet Tuesday morning.

Three thousand ‘‘Aibo" robotic dogs were sold at $2,066 each, it said.

Another 2,000 Aibos will go on sale also exclusively over the Internet in the United States Tuesday for $2,500 each.

Sony has no plans to make additional sales, a company spokesman said. The 11 inch tall Aibo can go for walks, wag its tail and be programmed to do tricks, although it cannot answer to its name.

3Com Begins Selling Hand-held Palm VII

3Com Corp.’s Palm Computing division on Monday said it began selling the wireless Palm VII hand-held computer for $599.

The Palm VII, which allows access to e-mail, Internet access, and instant messages, is available in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. It is

expected to be available nationally later this year.

Hundreds of content providers will provide Web content and e-commerce capabilities through the Palm VII. The Palm VII will allow users to trade stocks, pay bills, order movie tickets, locate the nearest recommended restaurant, get driving directions, local news and sports scores.

New Site for Shockwave Technology

Software maker Macromedia Inc. has formed a new unit to promote its Shockwave technology on a Web site it hopes will become an entertainment hub on the Internet.

The unit, called shockwave.com, will operate a Web site by the same name. The site will guide users to games, puzzles and animation created by Macromedia's Shockwave and Flash technology, the company said Monday. On the Web site, users will be able to download two pieces of software that play Shockwave files. The free Shockwave Remote allows Internet users to search out and play back music, comics and games, and then save up to five pieces of content for use at anytime - even when their computers are not connected to the Internet.

Internet Rule Group Hits Snags

An international group crafting rules to manage the Internet is stuck over how to give individuals a say in key debates such as how Web addresses are assigned.

The nonprofit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers said Friday it has drawn resistance from Internet denizens leery that any topdown decision-making process will crimp the collegial nature of the Web.

ICANN, which hopes to draft formal policies by Sept. 2000, was set up in October when the U.S. government said it no longer wants to manage the nuts and bolts of the Internet.

At a meeting this week in Berlin, the ICANN board appointed the Domain Names Supporting Organization to advise it on oversight of the domain name system.

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